



1 NAKO VILLAGE – AN INTRODUCTION



1.1. The Nako Monuments in Context

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It has long been recognised that the monuments of Nako village, in particular the four temples of the monastic complex at its western edge (see fig. 4) are part of to the most ancient Buddhist foundations preserved in the Western Himalayan region. The Nako temples were first visited and described by the renowned scholars A.H. Francke and Giuseppe Tucci in the first decades of the 20th century.¹ Following a period in which the entire region around Nako was largely inaccessible to foreigners, the gradual opening of the region from the 80s onwards resulted in new scholarly attention. Following Tucci's tracks, Deborah Klimburg-Salter brought the temples to our attention with her visit in 1989.² However, only on the basis of my subsequent efforts to document the oldest monuments as comprehensively as possible during two field trips in 1996 and 1998, could the art historical value of the monuments be fully appreciated.³ The new attention triggered through this documentation along with recent damage to the murals and sculptures of the monuments following a severe winter storm not only resulted in the nomination of the Nako monuments for listing among the 100 Most Endangered Sites 2002 by World Monuments Watch of the World Monuments Fund, but also in the conservation project celebrated with this publication.⁴

Originally, scholarly attention was largely focused on the oldest layers of art preserved in the village (see site plan in fig. 60). Most important are certainly those studies that focused on specific aspects of the temples' decoration, which not only helped to clarify the position of the Nako monuments among the Western Himalayan monuments, but also demonstrated the importance of what has been preserved at Nako for the understanding of the general development of Tibetan Buddhist art. Cited at the appropriate places throughout this survey, these studies have repeatedly shown that Nako preserves an important intermediate stage between the early monuments of the West Tibetan kingdom, such as Tabo, nearby in the lower Spiti Valley, and a later group of more Kashmir-related monuments only preserved in Ladakh and summarised as the Alchi group of monuments. These studies also were an important prerequisite for my own understanding of the oldest monuments as published in two survey studies a decade ago.⁵ With the exception of one more recent temple within the monastic complex studied in detail by Melissa Kerin (2008, 2010), the more recent artistic evidence of the village is still in need of survey studies, and specialised studies on different levels on their decoration are almost entirely lacking.

This contribution cannot make up for these lacunae but is an attempt to look at the Nako temples in a more comprehensive manner. Although many of the phases distinguished here are not more than hypothetical, it is hoped that this concise art history of the Nako temples

Fig. 4: Temple court of Lotsawa Lhakhang.

1 In particular Francke 1914¹: 32–34, pls. 12, 13 and Tucci 1935: 141–173, pls. 74–91.

2 See Klimburg-Salter 1990, which provides little information about the monuments itself. Following her, Thakur 1996 and di Mattia 1997 offer similarly rough overviews of the monuments.

3 At that time, I initiated the focus on Nako and also wrote the nomination of the Nako monuments with the World Monuments Funds.

4 See World Monuments Fund, available at: <www.wmf.org/project/nako-temples>.

5 Luczanits 2003b, 2004: 75–88, 119–123.

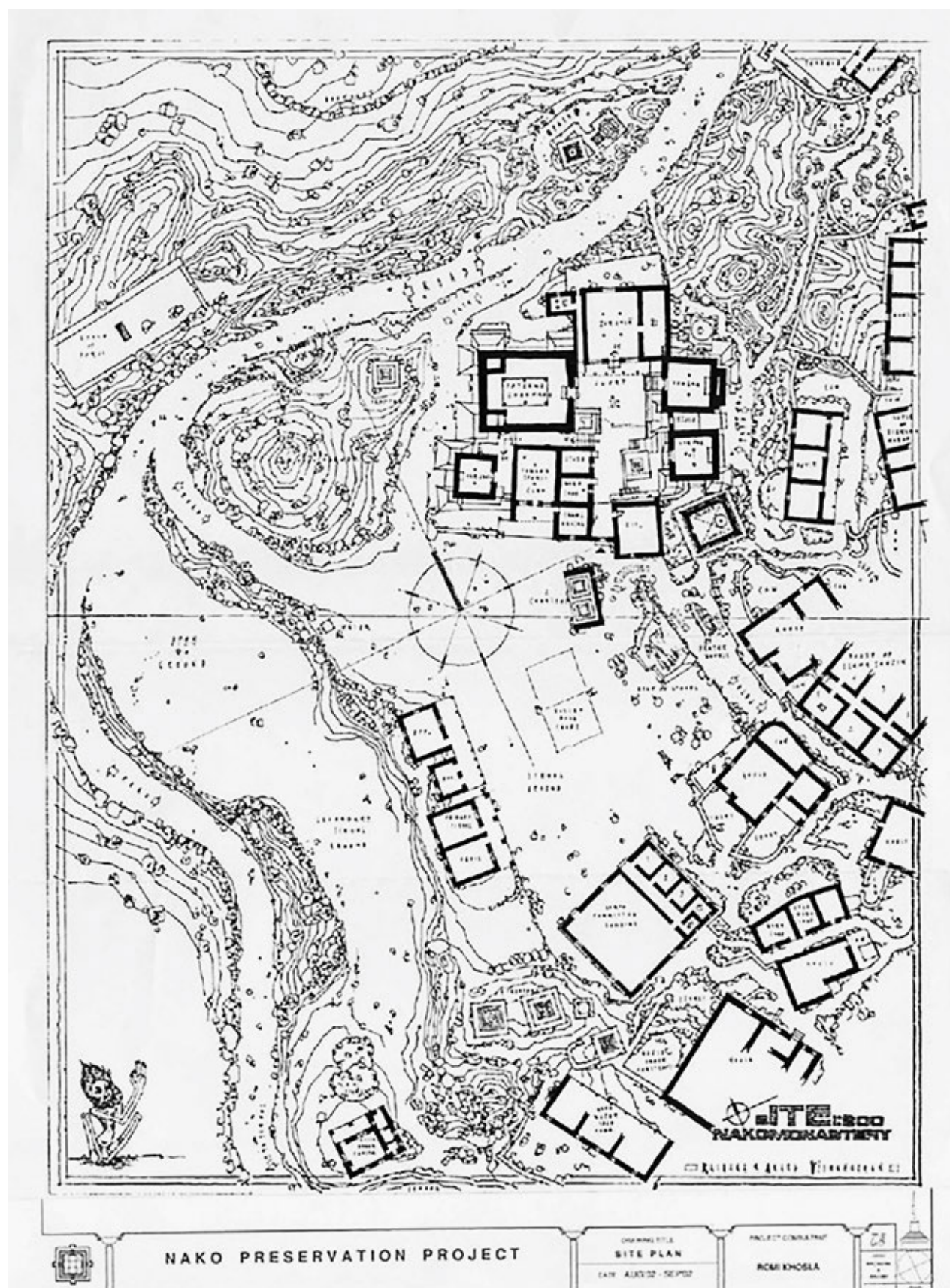




Fig. 5: Site plan of Nako.

Fig. 6: Nako Gompa.

Fig. 7: Nako Gompa.



provides a sound framework for future work. Especially the main temple of the complex has suffered considerably through history and contains historical overpaintings of different periods. Rather than only considering these more recent layers isolated within the structure, I am discussing each in terms of the historic phase to which it bears witness. Wherever possible, I also link these phases to other temples in the village and the wider region.

THE EARLIEST PHASE

The largest temple of Nako, the Main Temple (*gTsug lag khang*) or Translator's Temple (Lot-sawa Lhakhang, *Lo tsa ba lha khang*), is also the oldest monument in the village (see figs 7 and 61). The latter name signifies that the temple is considered a foundation of the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055), who is well known not only for his voluminous translation work of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan but also the temple foundations attributed to him. However, there is no internal evidence preserved that would support this attribution.

Instead, the earliest phase of the Nako monuments can safely be placed between the two benchmark monuments of early Buddhist art in the Western Himalayas, the Tabo Main Temple and the Three-Storeyed Temple at Alchi, also known as the Alchi Sumtsek (*gSum brtsegs*). The renovation of the Main Temple of Tabo monastery was finished by 1042 and provides a comparison attributable to the Purang-Guge Kingdom at the height of its power and material means.⁶ The Three-Storeyed Temple or Sumtsek at Alchi, in contrast, is located far away in Lower Ladakh and cannot have been completed before the early 13th century.⁷ As I have shown in a number of publications taking different angles, the Alchi Sumtsek is to be considered the last major monument of an independent early Buddhist artistic tradition in the Western Himalayas.⁸ Along with the other monuments in the Alchi group, the Sumtsek represents an offshoot of Western Himalayan art with close association to the latest flourishing of pre-Islamic art of Kashmir.⁹

The Translator's Temple is an almost square main hall with an apse of a little bit more than half its width in the back (see figs 60 and 63). The ceiling of the room is extremely high allowing the mandala circles on the side walls to cover almost the whole wall (see fig. 36 in Gruber's contribution). In its original conception, the Translator's Temple is dominated by three mandalas, the apse in the back of the temple is occupied by the deities of the Vajradhātu Mandala (see fig. 63), the left side wall by the Dharmadhātu Mandala (see fig. 64), and the right side wall by the Sarvavid Mandala (see fig. 65). Their relative location to each other is important, as it expresses a hierarchy between these mandalas that is also found in comparable monuments. The statue of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā to the left side of the niche (see fig. 166 in Müller's contribution) also belongs to the original conception, and she may once have had her own assembly painted around her.

⁶ Klimburg-Salter 1997; Luczanits 2004: 33–56.

⁷ Goepper 1990; Goepper and Poncar 1996.

⁸ Luczanits 2004: 125–195; and the more specialised articles Luczanits 2003a: example 1, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a. On the development of the Alchi monastic complex see Luczanits and Neuwirth 2010.

⁹ On the complexities of this relationship see also Flood 2009: 61–87.

Vajradhātu Mandala

The apse in the back of the temple is occupied by the clay statues of the Five Buddhas with Vairocana in the centre (see fig. 130 in Loseries' contribution). These sculptures, as well as a figure of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā on the wall to the left of the apse (see fig. 165 in Müller's contribution), have been considerably altered through repair and overpainting. For example all jewellery of the sculptures was replaced and some of the figures were almost completely reworked (see fig. 68).¹⁰ However, in their original appearance these statues do go back to the time of the foundation of the temple, when the temple walls were also painted. This is not only indicated by their relationship to the original paint layer in the apse, but also by some sculptural detail, which despite the overpainting are evidence of the high quality of the original workmanship. This is best visible in the throne frames of the main images, in particular the fantastic depictions of the sea monsters (*makara*) placed on the upper cross-bar of the thrones (fig. 8).

The Five Buddhas in the apse represent the core deities of a Vajradhātu Mandala, the secondary deities of which have been painted around them. However, only a small part of the original paintings depicting these deities is preserved, mostly to the side and below the figure of Ratnasambhava, who is also the only Buddha of whom the painted animal mounts, a pair of horses, are preserved (fig. 9). Besides the horses painted below, the throne as Ratnasambhava's vehicle (*vahana*), there is a representation of Bodhisattva Vajraketu, holding a banner in his right hand. Vajraketu is one of the four Vajra-Bodhisattvas surrounding Ratnasambhava in the Vajradhātu Mandala. Even more decisive is a vajra painted inside an aureole representing the goddess Sattvavajrī (*rDo rje sems ma*) who attends the central Vairocana. These



Fig. 8: Sea monster (*makara*) on the cross bar of Vairocana's throne.

Fig. 9: Deities of the Vajradhātu Mandala painted to the side of the sculpture of Ratnasambhava.

¹⁰ The nature and different layers of repair can now be better understood through the technical analyses undertaken by the Institute of Conservation, University of Applied Arts Vienna. (Pöllnitz 2009; see also contribution by Bayerová in this book).

paintings, as fragmentary as they are, not only allow for a more precise identification of the depicted theme, but also confirm that the sculptures of the Five Buddhas belong to the original conception of the temple. Minor fragments of the original paint layer, most representing robed Buddhas, can be observed throughout the apse, and in the lower level are the highly fragmentary remains of a large wall-text,¹¹ but nothing else is preserved enough to contribute further to the interpretation of the apse.

Dharmadhātu Mandala



Fig. 10: Buddha Amoghasiddhi of the Dharmadhātu Mandala.



Fig. 11: Goddess Tārā, consort of Amoghasiddhi in the Dharmadhātu Mandala.



Fig. 12: The minister of the Seven Jewels of a Universal Monarch (*cakravartin*) in the Dharmadhātu Mandala shown in local dress.

The best preserved original paintings in the Translator's Temple are those of the south wall (see fig. 64). The whole wall is occupied by a single mandala of an eight-armed tantric form of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, called Mañjughoṣa or more precisely Dharmadhātuvāgiśvara-mañjuśrī, a name that can be translated as "Mañjuśrī, the Speech Lord of the Sphere of [Buddhist] Doctrine". This deity is closely associated with Buddha Vairocana and represents him in this mandala, the full name of which is Dharmadhātuvāgiśvaramañjuśrī mandala.¹² Generally, the Dharmadhātu Mandala is of crucial importance in the early Buddhist monuments of the Western Himalayas from the 10th to the 13th century, as it is the most frequently represented mandala in the region besides the Vajradhātu Mandala itself, and also is second to that in hierarchy. The Nako representation is certainly the most detailed and expressive depiction of this mandala preserved throughout the Himalayas.

¹¹ Kurt Tropper is working on this inscription.

¹² This mandala is described in numerous sources, of which the DVMV-Q 1955 appears to be most relevant for the Nako depiction. Other sources consulted are de Mallmann 1964, 1986: 60–62; Nagano and Tachikawa 1989; Tachikawa 1999.

The Dharmadhātu Mandala is centred on a white or yellow, four-faced and eight-armed form of the Bodhisattva, which in Nako has been coarsely overpainted in white (see fig. 132 in Loseries' contribution). The main image is surrounded by the so-called Eight Uṣṇīṣa, their name referring to the cranial protuberance of the Buddha (see Luczanits 2003b, fig. 2a). The four other Buddhas bear their usual name, but are also four-headed and eight-armed (fig. 10) and are surrounded by the Sixteen Vajra-Bodhisattvas, a group of deities that also occurs in the Vajradhātu Mandala. Together with the female counterparts of the Buddhas (fig. 11), placed in the intermediate directions, these deities occupy the central circle of the mandala.

Around the central circle, in the corners of the inner square, the Seven Jewels of a World Ruler (*cakravartin*) are drawn along with an additional symbol not preserved. Among these, the illustration of the Precious Queen, dressed in an almost transparent white coat in the local style and wearing rows of necklaces (see Luczanits 2003b, fig. 2b), and the Precious Minister, dressed in a blue coat and wearing a flat hat of the same colour, give an indication of the garb of local nobility (fig. 12). Finally, four wrathful gate-keepers protect the doors of the inner palace (fig. 13, left), which represents the first or inner circle of the mandala.

The second square of the mandala, and also its second circle of deities, contains forty-eight female personifications of a Bodhisattva's stages, qualities or accomplishments. Two of them are shown seated in the centre of figure 13, goddesses personifying magic spells (*dhāraṇī*) and seated in the northern quarter of the second circle. In addition, four offering goddesses occupy the corners of this square, and four female gate-keepers protect its doors (fig. 13, right goddess).

The third or outer palace of the mandala, the third circle of deities, accommodates the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon, again a group of deities shared with other mandalas, but the arrangement and iconography of the Bodhisattvas in this group are quite diverse from case to case.¹³ The Bodhisattvas are joined by eight offering goddesses represented to



Fig. 13: Two gate-keepers and two goddesses personifying magic spells of the second palace of the Dharmadhātu Mandala.

13 See the description of the Lhakhang Gongma for these Bodhisattvas in the Vajradhātu Mandala.

Fig. 14: Western gate of the Dharmadhātu Mandala with the gate-keeper Padmāntaka.



their sides, the goddess Gandhā being drawn with exceptional attention to detail (see fig. 110 in Kerin's contribution). In addition, eight wrathful deities occupy the gates and corners of this square, among them the red Padmāntaka in the western gate (fig. 14). Here the mandala architecture concludes with four elaborate gates and the outer circles of vajra and fire.

It is rather unusual, but not unique, that the deities of the outermost and fourth circle of the mandala are represented outside the mandala proper which is concluded by the fire circle.¹⁴ In Nako, the protective deities assembled in this circle take up the remaining wall space to the left and right of the mandala proper. There, an assembly of originally 156 deities was depicted in thirteen rows. Besides more common groups, such as the Four Great Kings (*caturmahārāja*) and the Guardians of the Directions (*dikpāla*),¹⁵ this assembly contains a rich array of Hindu and pan-Indian deities and thus is a vivid example for the rich Indian heritage transferred to the Tibetans. As a detailed study of this representation has shown, at Nako more deities are represented than usually described in the texts, and thus some groups of deities represented are yet to be identified more precisely.¹⁶

Sarvavid Mandala

The north wall is also covered by a single mandala, but its central section was repainted during a later period (see fig. 65). Nevertheless, it can be identified as one of the main mandalas as described in the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, a text dedicated to rituals that purify from the three lower destinies of rebirth. It is the depiction of these destinies around the mandala that ascertains its identification (see below).¹⁷ This mandala is also closely related to

¹⁴ Other examples are preserved in one of the Dunkhar caves, the Guhyasamāja Cave (Pritzker 1996), and Saspol Tse, where only one side of the outermost deities is left.

¹⁵ See Luczanits 2003b, fig. 2a for the representation of Rāvaṇa as protector of the southwestern direction.

¹⁶ Compare Luczanits 2008 with, e.g. de Mallmann 1986: 62.

¹⁷ The mandala as it is depicted here and at other places in the Western Himalayas is not identical with

the Vajradhātu Mandala and developed similarly in the early 8th century. Here, too, Buddha Vairocana occupies the centre, in this case he is seated in meditation, has four heads, and is called Sarvavid Vairocana (*sarvavid* means “all-knowing”). I thus refer to this mandala as the Sarvavid Mandala.

In the centre of the Sarvavid Mandala Vairocana is surrounded by two circles of deities, four Buddhas and goddesses on the inner circle—the Buddhas differing in name and iconography from the usual Five Buddhas—and the Sixteen Vajra-Bodhisattvas. Four offering goddesses occupy the corners of the central square. The overpainting of the centre thus follows the original, but the original iconographic details of the deities are lost.

The central palace is surrounded by three squares of different background colour, each of them occupied by another group of deities. In the inner square are the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon, each with individual iconography. In the middle square are the eight monks and eight Solitary Buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*), which are not differentiated individually. In the outer square are the Eight Wrathful Ones and four offering goddesses, four more wrathful deities occupying the corners.¹⁸ This concludes the actual mandala palace, the outer doors of which are richly decorated. Outside the palace, but within the mandala proper and thus surrounded by the vajra and fire circles, is a circle of Hindu and pan-Indian deities serving as protectors. In the cardinal directions are the Guardians of the Directions, such as Kubera in the north.



Fig. 15: The realm of the hungry ghosts in the upper right corner outside the Sarvavid Mandala.

Fig. 16: The realm of the animals in the upper left corner outside the Sarvavid Mandala.

that described in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, which essentially represents the second main mandala of this cycle headed by Mahāvairocana in the form of Śākyasiṃha. This one, too, may have the destinies depicted around it.

18 See also Luczanits 2003b, fig. 3b.

Outside the mandala the Six Realms of Existence are depicted, with an emphasis on the lower ones to be avoided. The “hells” in the bottom left are largely lost, but the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts in the top left corner and that of the animals in the top right are the most vivid representations of those themes that have come down to us. The realms of the humans, gods and demi-gods (*asura*) in the lower right corner are marked by a large representation of a stupa, but otherwise very little remains. The Nako depiction is the earliest known representation of these realms throughout the Himalayas and also the most elaborate one known so far. In the sorrowful world of the hungry ghosts food burns in the mouths as well as on the plates (fig. 15).¹⁹ The world of animals is rich in different species set against differently coloured backgrounds (fig. 16). Among others a curious turtle-like creature is represented on the terrain just below the white elephant, while the water is dominated by a sea monster (*makara*). Note the fish whose outline was delineated but who was never painted.²⁰ Alterations in the background cannot be accidental, and rather are indicative of different categories of hell and animal realms. The use of red in the hells is indicative of burning mouths and food, though in the animal realm, red rather alludes to the hot Indian plains where the elephant lives, while the upper bright areas appear to indicate highlands and steppes and their animals, with the camel in a position of transition.

Further, the thirty-eight planetary deities represented in columns of fourteen rows to the left and right of the mandala belong to its assembly. One of the best preserved deities in this group is Rahu, the personification of the eclipse, with the lower body of a snake and holding the sun and moon disks in his hands (see Luczanits 2003b, fig. 3e). The iconography of the stars and constellations (lunar mansions), embodied as distinctive goddesses, still awaits a detailed study. These deities certainly cannot be identified on the basis of the obvious canonical textual sources used for this article. Separating the planetary deities from the other Hindu and pan-Indian deities in this way is unique to the Nako representation.

A comparison of individual deities in the two mandalas opposite each other reveals that stylistically the paintings of the north wall differ considerably from those on the south wall. In addition, there are also distinct iconographic differences when the same deity is represented on both sides. This clearly indicates that the walls of the Translator’s Temple were painted by two groups of artists with different artistic backgrounds.

Both the Dharmadhātu and Sarvavid Mandala on the side walls of the Translator’s Temple are particularly remarkable for their gilded relief paintings. In the central circle of the south wall mandala, not only all jewellery of the deities is painted in high relief and gilded, but also the haloes and other decorative elements (fig. 11). Equally, the flames of the mandala circle are gilded and the garlands with faces of glory (*kīrtimukha*) along the mandala palace walls are virtually three dimensional due to this technique. On the north wall the raised and gilded sections are less conspicuous, but even more refined than on the south wall; this feature is particularly true for the depiction of the deities.²¹ Sadly in many instances, this gilding has been scratched off in want of gold.

¹⁹ See also Luczanits 2003b, fig. 3c, depicting a stream of hot and cold water in this realm.

²⁰ See Luczanits 2003b, fig. 3d.

²¹ See Luczanits 2003b, fig. 3a.

Perfection of Wisdom

Returning to the main wall of the temple, to the left of the niche containing the Five Buddhas heading a Vajradhātu Mandala assembly is a sculpture of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā (see fig. 166 in Müller's contribution). This sculpture is part of the original assembly, as also proved by fragments of paintings and inscriptions underneath her. This statue has been severely damaged by a water intrusion in 1998 and the present version is a reconstruction made as part of the restoration of the temple.

The area underneath the sculpture of Prajñāpāramitā preserves three original motives. Directly under the throne was a row of four Buddhas, only one of them well preserved, another one lost in the 1998 water intrusion. To the right of the fourth Buddha is a depiction of Green Tārā standing in an idealised single-celled temple structure topped by an *āmalaka*, a stone-finial resembling the myrobalan fruit (fig. 17), and related to this depiction underneath is an only vaguely discernible donor depiction of which the context can now, after the cleaning of this area, be better understood. Underneath the donor depiction are the remains of an incomplete inscription of four stanzas.²² As the sculpture of Prajñāpāramitā, Green Tārā is a new motive in the murals in the area, as is the architecture in which she is placed. Such structures are found throughout Northwestern India and, of course, in Kashmir, but the depiction is not faithful enough to real architecture to actually allow speculation on a place of origin. Given the poor condition of this section, it is necessary to describe this important depiction in detail.

Within the temple, Tārā stands in a relaxed attitude, her legs crossed at knee level. Her right hand performs the gesture of giving (*varadamudrā*) and her left hand, palm up, is raised to her side (fig. 18). Just outside the pillars demarcating the temple's interior, the goddess is



Fig. 17: The area underneath Prajñāpāramitā after cleaning.

Fig. 18: Green Tārā inside a temple.

²² For a transcription of the legible parts of the inscription see Luczanits 2004: 300-301.

flanked by two much smaller figures, their heads only reaching to the level of the bent knee. On the right side probably stands a red skinned monk holding a begging bowl towards Tārā. The figure on the left is clearer and probably represents a royal donor. He seems to be bearded, has his right hand raised in a gesture of veneration (*vandanābhinayamudrā*) or waves a fly whisk. His upper body appears to be bare, as are his feet, and he wears a long red skirt bound at the hip. A small inscriptional panel underneath the king once may have identified the temple and the goddess. To the right, outside the temple, sits an extremely fragmented female donor in local garb and behind her stands a servant dressed in red holding some offering. Underneath them is another inscription panel of which only a few letters remained. The donor depiction noted earlier is represented directly underneath the temple scene and is centred on a male donor seated under a baldachin. He is surrounded by a group of seated figures and to the right of them are a few horses. Underneath of them is a panel containing the fragmentary inscription.

As such, this representation gives the impression that it is a distinctive place that is depicted here, and it reminds of the depiction of holy places attended by monks and venerated by kings as they are represented on the garment (*dhotī*) of Avalokiteśvara in the Alchi Sumtsek, but the Nako depiction lacks the distinctive Kashmiri elements that are so characteristic for those representations. Of course, the position of the king and his gesture does have precedence in Kashmir, in particular in the depiction of King Avantivarman.²³ This motive has been taken up regionally as well, as the Vajradharma sculpture of Poo demonstrates.²⁴

The door to a small protector's room in this area is most likely a later addition breaking through the right part of the wall into a room that has been built around the corner formed by the outer walls of the main hall and the apse. It may well be that the intention to add a protector's chapel to the older structure was the cause for this alteration.

Fragmentary Remains

The entrance wall has almost been completely replaced during a past repair and only bears a few fragments of a donor depiction to the left of the entrance. Its other paintings, rather coarsely executed, stem from different rather recent periods and will be dealt with below.

Similarly, the roof of the temple was destroyed in a 1975 earthquake, and for a considerable period only a cursorily attached tin roof covered the monument and protected the murals and sculptures. In the course of the conservation project documented by this publication, the roof had been replaced by one in a traditional style, also changing the position of the painted ceiling boards and clustering them together in the centre of the ceiling (see fig. 142). As the different periods evidenced in the painting on these boards indicate, this was only the most recent roof repair and even before this last repair only few of the ceiling panels could possibly have been in their original position.

Nevertheless, some of the brackets supporting the two main cross-beams retain their original painting (see fig. 144 in Kalantari's contribution), and also a few of the ceiling panels probably go back to the founding of the temple as well. These again attest to the originality and innovative power of the painters who decorated the temple. On one panel pairs of mythical animals have been inserted into squares formed by textile-like strips with circles overlapping

²³ See e.g. Fisher 1989: fig. 17.

²⁴ See Luczanits 1996: 73–75 and Luczanits 2013 for pictures of Vajradharma (available at: <http://www.luczanits.net/>).

each other as if patched together (see figs 152 and 153 in Kalantari's contribution). The ceilings are discussed in detail in the article by C. Kalantari in this publication.

EARLY EXPANSION

The impressive structure of the Translator's Temple is not the only early foundation at Nako. In fact, there are indications that several temples had soon been added to the complex, but it is unclear in what succession and how many. One such indication is the door of the White Temple (Karchung Lhakhang, *dKar chung lha khang*). This temple preserves a once-marvellous wooden door-frame, with only some scenes of the life of the Buddha carved on the lintel remaining legible today (see fig. 169 in Ziegler's contribution). Its deplorable condition, the simple architecture of the White Temple and the absence of any substantial earlier paint layer within that structure make it unlikely that its present location is original. Theoretically, it is even possible that this door once belonged to the Translator's Temple, but it would be rather unlikely that an original door would have been removed from the main temple and still re-used, and details of the woodcarvings appear closer to Alchi mural paintings than those of the Translator's Temple, thus indicating a slightly later date for the door.

The door may thus belong to an early expansion phase roughly contemporaneous with the Upper Temple (Lhakhang Gongma, *Lha khang gong ma*), which locally is ascribed to the same founder as the Translator's Temple. Situated directly opposite the Translator's Temple, the Upper Temple has a considerably higher floor level and is a much simpler construction (see fig. 75). Its square measures approximately 5.5 x 5.5 m, with a height of 4.6 m (see fig. 74). Despite its precarious condition before conservation in the early years of this millennium, the temple preserved much of its original interior decoration on all walls. While the main wall is covered mainly with statuary, the side and entrance walls still preserve extensive parts of the original murals (see fig. 36 in Gruber's contribution).

Even the two capitals carrying the two main beams, here aligned parallel to the side walls, and the brackets supporting them at the walls preserve considerable parts of their painting.



Fig. 19: Original capital, beams and brackets of the Upper Temple.

The central panel of the capitals is painted with a vase of plenty, a symbol of well-being, and the sides of the capitals have a carved triangular projections not found in the Translator's Temple (fig. 19).

Central Goddesses

The main wall of the Upper Temple is structured into two horizontal levels separated by a dividing line (see fig. 82). On the upper level is a unique sculptural configuration with a crudely reworked main image flanked by eight Buddhas in monk's robes, which preserve at least some of their original features. Undoubtedly, this configuration is to be identified as an assembly of the goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* (see fig. 164 in Müller's contribution), even though the number of Buddhas does not come up to the commonly described Buddhas of the ten directions. Comparable depictions are known from Alchi, but Nako preserves the only depiction hitherto known where a goddess, as the main image of a mandala composition, is flanked only by Buddhas.²⁵

In the lower level of the main wall, underneath the sculptures is a horizontal frieze depicting a unique, but fragmentary depiction of the Green *Tārā* rescuing from the eight dangers flanked by the group of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas in their heavenly mansions. Sadly, much of this lower level is damaged, some of it obviously afflicted on purpose, making an exact identification of all figures rather difficult.

The central image of Green *Tārā* rescuing from the eight dangers has been studied in great detail by Eva Allinger (2005). Four-headed and eight-armed, the badly mutilated *Tārā* stands under a large tree. Her eight arms correspond to the hands emerging from clouds with each of the dangers, which are represented to the sides of the goddess. While there is no direct textual source for this depiction, it is clear from Allinger's research that the *Tārā* represented here combines the eight dangers with *Tārā* as "Mother who produces all the Buddhas" from the *Tārā Tantra*.²⁶ An extensive row of offerings at the bottom of the scene is flanked by two female supplicants in local dress and possibly priests standing behind them.²⁷

Green *Tārā* is flanked by the Eight Great Bodhisattvas residing in beautifully detailed and varied palace structures, which reveal the dedication and skills of the artists (fig. 20). Too little is preserved from the Bodhisattvas of this group to be able to reconstruct the original composition and iconography through comparison and/or literary descriptions. The three Bodhisattvas that can be identified are *Mañjuśrī* and *Avalokiteśvara* occupying the two palaces to the left of Green *Tārā* while *Vajrapāṇi* is in the second palace to the right of the goddess. The latter holds a vajra in front of his chest and, uniquely for Western Himalayan depictions, is green.²⁸

The two-part composition on the main wall can be read as follows: on the central axis female donors present offerings to female main deities, both of which are considered as "mothers of the Buddhas". The lower level can be interpreted as more mundane, with Green *Tārā* and the Eight Great Bodhisattvas directly responding to the needs of our world. The upper

25 These sculptures have been studied in great detail in Perwög 2009.

26 For a translation of this tantra see Willson 1986: 44–85, the four-faced five Buddha forms described pp. 75–80. The colouring of the four faces of Green *Tārā* in Nako conforms to her being interpreted as the northern deity, with the colours of the other three secondary Buddhas in their respective directions, the yellow, southern back face represented on top, and *Vairocana* as the central Buddha.

27 See the complementary documentation to Allinger's article on Christian Luczanits' homepage <<http://www.luczanits.net/>>.

28 Green forms of this Bodhisattva are known from Northeast Indian manuscript illuminations.



Fig. 20: Superstructure of a heavenly palace inhabited by a Bodhisattva; main wall of the Upper Temple.

level assembly can be read as a cosmos of Buddhahood, with Prajñāpāramitā, the Perfection of Wisdom, as the mother of all Buddhas in the centre and the entire assembly hovering in space.

More Vajradhātu

The side walls continue the theme of Buddhas in the cosmos, but in this case there are mandalas floating in the middle of miraculous Buddha assemblies (see figs 80 and 81). In the corners are fragmentary remains of water ponds, from which a lotus stem flanked and supported by snake deities (*nāga*) emerges. Branches of these stems cover the entire surface to the sides of the mandalas, and envelope seated Buddhas performing different gestures. On the main wall side they also hold symbols of luck in the lower area, the Eight Auspicious Symbols on the left wall and the Seven Jewels of the King on the right wall. On the left wall there are also traces of a triad of deities centred on a standing white Bodhisattva.²⁹

As in the Translator's Temple, the side wall mandalas cover the whole height of the room, but the two represented here are practically identical versions of the Vajradhātu Mandala. Both consist of an inner circle divided into nine compartments surrounded by two palace structures, the inner one without gate-keepers. In both mandalas, one-headed Vairocana is in the centre and performs what appears to be a variant of the teaching gesture (*dharmacakramudrā*) in which the palms are directed towards the viewer; both feature the same groups of deities (fig. 21). Vairocana is surrounded by four goddesses personifying the symbols of the Buddha families, therefore also known as "mothers of the families". The squares in the cardinal directions are occupied by the four surrounding Buddhas and their Bo-

²⁹ There is very little detail preserved of these three deities: the middle one appears to be one-headed and two armed, and I cannot recognise a lotus on the available documentation. The left deity is green and holds a white object, possibly a conch in the left hand towards the mandala. This may thus be the offering goddess Gandhā. The third deity is probably white, but nothing else can be recognised.

dhisattva retinue, the Sixteen Vajra-Bodhisattvas. The corner compartments of the inner circle house the four inner offering goddesses, and the four outer goddesses are in the corners of the second square. The group of deities are rounded out with the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon and the four gate-keepers protecting the gates.

At first glance the iconography of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon represented in the outer palace appears different, but actually is the same, as in both cases the four Bodhisattvas in the same direction are all of the same iconography as the primary Bodhisattva of the family occupying that direction. Thus, for example, all Bodhisattva in the east hold a vajra and have the left on the hip (fig. 22), just like Vajrasattva in the retinue of Buddha Akṣobhya. The other Bodhisattvas assimilate Vajraratna, Vajradharma and Vajrakarma. Slightly different, alternating body colours are used in the right wall mandalas.



Fig. 21: Buddha Vairocana in the centre of the right wall Vajradhātu Mandala in the Upper Temple.



Fig. 22: Eastern Bodhisattva of the Fortunate Aeon with the iconography of Vajrasattva; Upper Temple, left side mandala.



Fig. 23: Northeast section of the Vajradhātu Mandala on the right side wall of the Upper Temple.

The four outer offering goddesses are in the corners of this palace, and the gate-keepers are shown peacefully.³⁰ Such a doubling of the mandalas is highly curious and only documented here. Possibly a very detailed study with textual sources will reveal that the slight differences in the layout, colouring and a few other details are actually significant and represent two different commentarial traditions.

In comparison to the Translator's Temple murals, the paintings of the Upper Temple are executed with great dedication to detailing (fig. 22). Hair and textile patterns, for example are extremely finely drawn, as are the details of the jewellery. As in the Translator's Temple, the shading is executed with particular commitment on orange-hued figures. Also featuring in the

³⁰ No gate-keeper is preserved from the left wall mandala, but the mandorlas in the gates indicate that they would have been wrathful. This is the only substantial iconographic difference between the two mandalas.

Upper Temple paintings are colourful decorative scrolls and scarves filling larger, otherwise void sections of the mandala. In the corners of the mandalas flower scrolls flow from a small vase (fig. 23), and the outer areas of the right wall mandala are filled with beautifully drawn ribbons.

East Asian Armour

Moving to the entry wall (see fig. 83), a vision of the realm of the Buddhas that is also the theme of the other walls is continued at the very top of the wall, with two rows of twenty seated Buddhas each. Underneath these rows of Buddhas and right above the entrance is another unique depiction among the Western Himalayan monuments. Instead of local protector deities, as represented at Tabo, or Mahākāla and his retinue, as in the Alchi group of monuments, in Nako



the Four Great Kings guard the entrance. As in the depiction of the same kings in the outermost assembly of the Vajradhātu Mandala in the Translator's Temple, they not only wear Chinese or Central Asian armoured dress but also have facial features consistent with this ethnic heritage. Each of the Four Great Kings has a differently coloured background, but only the leftmost depicted against yellow is really preserved, and even though he appears to have no mongoose, the club in his hand identifies him as Vaiśravaṇa (*rNam thos sras*), the protector of the north (fig. 24). One would thus expect the others follow the cardinal directions clockwise from east to west, but the colour scheme assigned to them—green, white and blue—does not facilitate a firm standpoint.³¹ Situated above the door, the Four Great Kings take an intermediate position between the heavenly and earthly realms, as they also do in the imagination of the cosmos, where they inhabit the palace on top of Mount Meru or the lowest heaven immediately above it.

Fig. 24: Vaiśravaṇa, the king of the northern direction, above the entrance to the Upper Temple.

That the arrangement of the Four Great Kings cannot be ascertained is a pity, as it would have helped to clarify the succession and arrangement of the group of figures at their sides, namely the Ten Wrathful Deities. To come to this number, I interpret the two protectors that were once sculpted to the sides of the door, and of which only their halos remain, with the two groups of four wrathful deities painted immediately above them. Again, too few are preserved with any iconographic details that one can be sure about their distribution, but given the cosmological conception of the temple this group makes perfect sense, as the Ten Wrathful Deities are directional protectors residing in the cardinal and intermediary directions as well

31 Green and white are both possible colours of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, guardian of the east. Virūḍhaka in the south could be against blue background, but Virupakṣa, in the west is to be expected red. See e.g. Skorupski 1983: 49–51.

as zenith and nadir.³² The original paintings underneath the halos of the two protector sculptures are heavily damaged and include two mandalas. On the left is a nine-deity mandala with a red semi-wrathful deity in the centre surrounded by what appears to be females seated in the posture of royal ease (*lalitāsana*).³³ To the right is a slightly smaller five-deity mandala of wrathful deities with vases in the intermediate direction.³⁴ No direct comparisons to these mandalas could be found, and thus they remain unidentified.³⁵ At the right side there are additionally four standing monks represented above each other along the edge of the wall, and a four-armed form of the Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara to the right of the mandala. The parallel area on the left wall is completely lost.

These two oldest temples of Nako attest to a distinctive phase in the early development of (Western) Tibetan Buddhism. The decorative, iconographic and technical details observable in the Nako paintings show a large number of inventions when compared with the renovation period murals in the Tabo Main Temple attributable to the mid-11th century. On the other side, the Nako murals often represent iconographic themes that find comparison in the far off Alchi monuments. However, these comparisons never match perfectly, but only closely enough to allow the main topics at Nako to be identified. Secondary topics, such as those at the entry wall of the Upper Temple, rather compare to West Tibetan monuments such as Dunkhar and Phyang.

Also the other two temples in the monastic compound, the White Temple and the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang, bear traces of an older paint layer that may go back to this first flourishing of the site, but not enough is visible to ascertain this.

EARLY DRIGUNG PHASE

A major change in cultural background then becomes visible with the Padmasambhava Temple on the southern end of the village. The temple is built around a central pillar housing a rock with the footprint and a niche with a statue of this venerated teacher (fig. 25). Its murals are completely darkened by soot and extremely difficult to read and photograph. Damage, graffiti and splashes of whitewash have further distorted their appearance, and mirroring makes photography largely unsuccessful. The paintings on the outside of the central pillar are

32 The iconographic details preserved are as follows: the deities on the left side are (from left to right): lost; bright blue, brandishing sword; green grey, hand raised at side; black, brandishing vajra or object with vajra end and holding skull-cup (*kapāla*), the only one standing on corpse. The deities on the right side are: yellow with red shading, with horse head on top = Hayagrīva; dark green, rounded black object held to the side; blue brandishing a sword and threatening gesture (*tarjanīmudrā*; damaged after 1994); black with long object held upright at the side (sword or club) and skull-cup (*kapāla*).

33 The mandala is too poorly preserved for identification of iconographic details for any of its figures. As in some early mandala depiction it is just a circle of deities, the outer rim formed by a row of blossoms or wheels, but here a row of red blossoms (?) surrounds the mandala as well.

34 It is clear that this mandala is centred on an at least three-headed deity that may have been blue (the present white being the ground layer). This deity is surrounded by four wrathful deities in the cardinal directions, the upper (western) one being blue and brandishing a vajra. In the intermediate directions of the eight-petalled lotus are vases. The mandala is surrounded by vajra and fire circles and a channel ground is depicted outside of it, the last clearly legible parts of which have been obliterated by the post 1994 water damage.

35 My current favourite theory is that the nine-deity mandala represents some form of red Avalokiteśvara. Mandalas showing him in similar position are represented in the Guhyasamāja cave at Dunkar, where it is an Amoghapaśa Mandala. The same cave has a Five-Deity Vajrapāṇi Mandala on the right side of the door, but the Nako mandala may have Trailokyavijaya or Vajrahūmkara in the centre.



Fig. 25: The image and footprint of Padmasambhava, in the centre of the Padmasambhava Temple.

even more damaged than those in some sections of the surrounding walls. I thus can offer only a general overview of the temples' iconographic programme and a rather basic stylistic analysis of some of the better preserved examples for historic assessment.



Fig. 26: White Tārā, entry wall of the Padmasambhava Temple.



Fig. 27: Buddha Śākyamuni, right side wall of the Padmasambhava Temple.

A marked shift from the earlier monuments is immediately apparent due to the red background of the paintings and the strongly compartmentalised compositions on the walls. As before, the murals are topped by a valance, now marked by faces of glory (*kīrtimukha*) emitting clouds in alternation with the triple jewel symbol, while a lozenge pattern marks the bottom of the painted area.

Starting at the entrance located in the corner of the west wall and continuing clockwise, the visitor is first confronted with a composition of Green Tārā flanked by White Tārā (fig. 26) and what appears to be a white male deity, possibly Buddha Vairocana.³⁶ Among others, they are surrounded by further goddesses in the posture of royal ease (*lalitāsana*), thus possibly representing the group of twenty-one Tārās. The following left side wall decoration appears to be completely lost. The back wall (east) has a large mandala in its centre, which I could not identify on the basis of the available photographs.³⁷ This is a pity, because it is this mandala to which the inscribed teaching lineage at the top of the wall likely refers.³⁸ To the right of it is a large multi-armed Avalokiteśvara and smaller representations of other forms of the same deity, such as Ṣaḍakṣara Lokeśvara and Rakta Lokeśvara.

The images on the right or south wall are certainly the best preserved and focus on the earth-touching (*bhūmiśparśamudrā*) Buddha Śākyamuni (fig. 27) flanked by the Buddha of Endless Life, Amitāyus, and the goddess Prajñāpāramitā. The upper row of this wall displays depictions of historical personages and, in the upper right corner just to the side of the entrance, is an inscription. The latter is poorly preserved and has been studied in detail by Kurt Tropper (2010a). The Four-armed Mahākāla underneath the inscription panel and the three riders above the entrance, thus in the left corner of the west wall, serve as protectors of the monument and conclude the iconographic programme of the outer walls.

³⁶ If this is indeed the case the relative position of the deities would be contrary to the conventions usually employed.

³⁷ In the mandala there is a dark main deity with the right hand extended to the knee surrounded by two circles of lotus petals with eight peaceful deities each. Four more peaceful deities are in the corners and sixteen more in the surrounding square. Further, it is clear that the eastern gate is occupied by a white wrathful protector and probably a seated, booted deity in red dress (one of the Four Great Kings?).

³⁸ For the list of the difficult to read names see Tropper 2010a: 166–169.

The central pillar walls are also painted. Besides some smaller protective deities at each side of the niche of Padmasambhava's footprints, the other walls are occupied by a Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara flanked by deities of the Lotus Family, Amitābha and another large central seated Buddha too damaged to be identified.³⁹ In terms of quality and style the majority of these paintings are certainly later than the mural fragments on the outer walls.

Neither the captions on the back wall, nor the inscription provide unambiguous historical information on the founding of the monument, its decoration or even school affiliation. As Tropper has pointed out, the possible mentioning of a *Dharma mtshan can*, "one who's name contains the word Dharma" (*chos*), does not provide a historical context either (Tropper 2010a: 147–149). However, the occurrence of the same phrase in a caption identifying a monk in the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang indicates a Drigung (*'Bri gung*) affiliation for the Padmasambhava Temple as well. This would not be surprising, as by the late 13th century the Drigung School was heavily promoting teachings derived from the Lotus Teacher (Padmasambhava), as is obvious from the iconographic programme in Wanla, Ladakh.

The majority of deities in the temple is associated with compassion, with wisdom taking a secondary position, and there is no theme that could be attributed to Highest Yoga Tantras, except for possibly the mandala at the back wall. The iconographic themes, the entirely different aesthetic of the murals are indicative of a major shift in the religious and artistic milieu of the earlier monuments. In terms of art, the Padmasambhava Temple marks the shift from the earlier Western Himalayan painting style to a local variant of a Central Tibet-derived style as it emerges in the region in the course of the 13th century. While there are many monuments of this style and type in Ladakh, this is the only major example preserved in the Spiti Valley.⁴⁰

Stylistic indicators of the Nako depictions are the lotus pillar columns, veiled throne backs with curved backrest projections terminating in blossoms, the rosettes above the Buddha's ears (fig. 27), and the highlight along the ridge of Amitāyus' nose. These features are more characteristic of the later Ladakhi monuments sharing this style, such as the earlier Alchi Tsatsapuri Temples and the Guru Lhakhang in Phyang, pointing towards a date for the Padmasambhava Temple in the late 14th century. In terms of workmanship and painting quality, however, the Padmasambhava Temple supersedes the comparable Ladakhi monuments.

DRIGUNG GUGE PHASE

The more general themes seen in the Padmasambhava Temple also prevail in the later monuments and repairs of Nako. Of these the somewhat confusingly called "Temple of Wide Proportions", the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang (*rGya 'phags pa lha khang*) then clearly evinces a Drigung School context (see fig. 92). This temple is described in a separate contribution to this volume (see article by M. Kerin) therefore I am just mentioning those aspects of it that are most important to this overview. The temple is of similar size as the Upper Temple, and stands just to the side of it, but its interior differs considerably. All walls are painted in pastel tone colours featuring a single theme each. On the main wall Buddha Śākyamuni flanked by his chief disciples is joined by the group of eight Indian scholars revered in the Tibetan tradition (see fig. 99). On the left side wall, Ādibuddha Vajradhara flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas is accompanied by the Eight Great Siddhas (*grub thob chen po brgyad*) (see fig. 97). This wall also

39 The succession of these themes could not be ascertained on the basis of the photographs.

40 The paintings inside three stupas dome at Tabo monastery are also evidence of an earlier variant of this style.



Fig. 28: Three-headed Hayagrīva brandishing a club; apse of the Translator's Temple.

portrays the founder of the school, identified as Jigten Gonpo (*Jig rten mgon po*), and the monk called Dharma Tshenchen (see fig. 119 in Kerin's contribution).⁴¹ On the right wall the goddess Prajñāpāramitā is flanked by Buddhas (see fig. 98), and on the entry wall the school's protectress Achi (*A phyi*) features prominently above the door (see fig. 100).

We can read this temple as each wall dedicated to a specific theme, which together encompass the basics of the Buddhist teaching for both the lay and the monastic community.

⁴¹ As Jigten Gonpo is an incarnation of Nāgārjuna, depicted at his side, this monastic teacher may be an incarnation of Indrabhūti, shown as the top siddha on his side.

The teaching of the Buddha himself, as communicated by the great Indian teachers succeeding him, is the foundation of Buddhism and Buddhist practice. Buddha Vajradhara stands for the esoteric Buddhist teachings and practices transmitted through the Indian adepts to Tibet and continued there in an oral lineage tradition (*bka' brgyud*), here specifically the Drigung Kagyu School. The goddess Prajñāpāramitā stands for the correct understanding of the phenomena of the world which sprouts from the roots of Buddhist practice and the wisdom aspect of the Buddhist practice itself. As such, this is a wonderfully conceived programme that is concurrently comprehensive and concise and directed towards both monastic and lay communities. As Melissa Kerin (2008, 2010) has already shown, stylistically these paintings reflect a local variant of the Guge style. As also revealed in the colour palette, this style can be seen as a revival of the earlier Western Himalayan painting.

The Gyaphagpa Lhakhang is not the only temple featuring paintings of this period, as damages to earlier monuments were repaired in this style as well. Of particular importance in this regard are the murals in the apse of the Translator's Temple (see fig. 130 in Loseries' contribution). There, on the main wall of the apse above the sculpture of Buddha Ratnasambhava are four rows of four Buddhas in a Guge style, and on the other side of Vairocana's throne frame, above Buddha Amitābha, is Milarepa flanked by his pupils Gampopa and Rechungpa and surrounded by seven additional figures, six of them again representing Milarepa at different episodes of his life (see fig. 124 in Kerin's contribution). In the bottom right corner underneath Milarepa the naked Indian adept Phadampa Sangye is represented (see fig. 125 in Kerin's contribution). Further down on the wall, a three-headed, two-armed, red Hayagrīva (fig. 28) joins Vajrapāṇi in protecting the dharma.

The niche's left side wall features Śākyamuni seated on a lion throne flanked by smaller Buddhas, the nine on the left side preserved from that period, the others even later repairs, indicating that this area has been a weak spot in the architecture of the building. Underneath the Amoghasiddhi sculpture the Five Sisters of Long Life (*Tshe ring mched lnga*), a popular group of five goddesses riding different vehicles who became protectors of the dharma after serving as practice consorts to Milarepa, are added to the pantheon.⁴² On the right side wall is Buddha Vajradhara surrounded by teachers. While the main figure seen today is certainly a later replacement, the more narrowly spaced rows of teachers on the left side (6 rows of the first 3 and more teachers) derive from the original phase of this layer. In addition, there are two Guge-style goddesses to the side of Akṣobhya, namely White and Green Tārā. The row of protective deities from the main wall is continued with two wealth deities, the wrathful Black Jambhala and the Yellow Jambhala.

Only the explicit evidence of the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang places these paintings into the proper Drigung School context. The iconographic themes of these repainting in the Translator's Temple largely mirror those of the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang, but by the nature of their purpose are much less organised. In the Translator's Temple's niche, the representations of Śākyamuni, Vajradhara and Milarepa complement the earlier Yoga Tantra theme and update the temple iconographically with an emphasis on oral transmission, through Vajradhara and the lineage teachers represented to his sides, and indigenous Tibetan practice as exemplified by Milarepa.

42 Their names are Tashi Tsheringma (*bKra shis tshe ring ma*), Thinggi Zhalzangma (*mThing gi zhal bzang ma*), Miyo Lobzangma (*Mi gyo blo bzang ma*), Chodpan Drinzangma (*Cod pan mgrin bzang ma*) and Tekar Drozangma (*gTad dkar 'gro bzang ma*).



Fig. 29: The hungry ghost Sūcimukha kneeling at the feet of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara; right side wall of the White Temple.

It is remarkable that Nako remained in Drigung hands even after the emergence of the Guge Kingdom in the late 14th century and was not, as nearby Tabo Monastery, converted into a Gelug School establishment. Judging from the quality of the Guge-period paintings, the Drigung community at Nako certainly did not receive the highest Guge patronage. Guge scroll paintings (*thang ka*) of the Drigung School are rather rare, but two recently identified paintings collected and originally published by Giuseppe Tucci show that Drigung painting may also have been overlooked or misidentified so far.⁴³ The Guge heritage continues in the White Temple, the fourth monument within the monastic compound, but its affiliation is unclear from the little that is preserved of its main paintings.

EXTENDED GUGE PHASE

At first glance, the paintings of the White Temple (see fig. 102) look more recent and also of poorer quality than those of the Gyaphagpa Lhakhang. Again, the temple features single topics on the main walls, and in terms of content they are of a rather general nature. But the

⁴³ Two paintings could be ascribed to the Drigung School: one, Tucci 1949: pl. 5, represents the Eighty-four Mahāsiddha; the other, Tucci 1949: pl. 40, 41, Milarepa. Their identification will be corrected in David Jackson's forthcoming book on the art of the Drigung School, the Mahāsiddha painting in my contribution to this book (Luczanits forthcoming).

condition of the temple is much worse and most of the walls also contain several layers of overpainting (see fig. 104).

Almost nothing is left of the main wall, which once featured a large Buddha Śākyamuni flanked by his chief disciples in the centre (see fig. 109). It is likely that the Sixteen Arhats were painted around them in the lower half of the wall, and additional Buddhas filled the remaining wall space at the top and along the sides. The left wall is dedicated to Buddha Amitābha and his pure land Sukhāvātī (see fig. 107). This wall is fairly well readable and both, the central Buddha and the beings reborn on lotuses in his realm are clearly recognisable. On the right wall, a large central Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara is flanked by the Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi, forming a triad referred to as Protectors of the Three Families (see fig. 106). These are the main Bodhisattvas of the Buddha-, lotus- and vajra-family, who counter the three poisons that keep sentient beings clinging to the cycle of rebirth. Along the edges some of the Five Buddhas are still recognisable, the best preserved of them being the orange Vairocana seated on a lion throne in the upper right corner. Here Vairocana assumes the western position, as he has changed place with Buddha Amitābha, to whose family the central Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara belongs. Between the Buddhas are offering goddesses and there may have been protectors at the bottom, completing the mandala assembly. The entrance wall certainly suffered the most of the entire building, and its paintings of protective deities as visible today do not belong to the original phase of this building (see fig. 108).

The original quality of these paintings can today only be judged from some of the preserved fragments. Particularly telling is a detail of the hungry ghost Sūcimukha kneeling at the feet of Avalokiteśvara and raising his hands to receive nectar (fig. 29). To his side the background is covered with a finely drawn lotus scroll pattern that suggests how good the original quality of the paintings must have been. Noteworthy is also the outlining of the main features through a shadow line following the contours, as perceivable along the Bodhisattva's scarf and around Sūcimukha.

In this temple too, there are some fragmentary remains of painted ceiling boards (see fig. 105), but given their distribution and location today it is not even sure if they are original to this temple or were integrated at a later stage from one of the other monuments. Judging from the motives and quality of the paintings on these panels they range from the earliest monuments in the complex to the Guge period, the latter, featuring more extensive themes which span the entire space between pillars, are only preserved in very few fragments.

Through its iconography, the White Temple emphasises those Buddhas and deities with direct influence on the present day. Together with the Sixteen Arhats Śākyamuni represents the continuity of the Buddhist teaching on earth. The wish to be reborn in Sukhāvātī, in the paradise created by the Buddha Amitābha, is an intermediate goal for Buddhist practitioners, and the compassionate Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara is evoked for immediate help in the present life, as does the hungry ghost Sūcimukha (fig. 29).

The Guge period paintings at Nako are of considerable historical importance not only for the Drigung School, but also for their unique and sophisticated compositions. Whether it is the programme of the Gyaphagpa, the rendering of Milarepa with his repeated depictions in the Translator's Temple, or the composition of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara in the White Temple, each temple preserves an unusual or even unique element of that period.

MORE RECENT CHANGES

Today the White Temple is also called the Temple of Purgyal, as it is used for services to the deity of the Purgyal Mountain just behind Nako, which dominates the region. The only expression of his presence in the temple is the brick altar placed in the centre of the main wall (see fig. 109). It is unclear since when this temple has been used in this way, but the temple's conversion into a place of worship for the local mountain deity testifies for the loss of the monastic community at Nako that must have taken place sometime after the Guge period.

While in many places throughout the Western Himalayas there is no further development, at Nako Buddhist patronage continued through the construction of two Prayer-wheel Temples (Mani Lhakhang). Of similar size, composition and structure, in their origin the two temples must be of similar age. Both have a prayer wheel in the centre flanked by two sculptures. The building which was still preserved in its original state in 2006 contains images of Śākyamuni and Avalokiteśvara as well as blackened murals documenting Nako's new affiliation with the Drukpa Kagyu (*'Brug pa bka' brgyud*) School. The second temple houses images of Ṣaḍakṣara Lokeśvara and Padmasambhava, which have been repainted in garish colours in recent years. Even its oldest paintings differ stylistically from the other temple, but my documentation is insufficient to attempt a description of their programme or a historical attribution of the oldest layer. They are merely mentioned here to set the more recent repairs to the temples of the monastic complex into context.

In the Translator's Temple two main areas are most relevant in this regard, that above the sculpture of Prajñāpāramitā and the entry wall. Only a very small section of its original substance is preserved in the entry wall (see figs 258 and 259), and it is thus quite possible that it once collapsed almost entirely. In addition, its paintings are clearly of different, but not too distant, periods and possibly even affiliation. As in the much earlier Upper Temple, the Four Great Kings are shown directly above the door. These paintings may not be the oldest on the wall, the different layers of which cannot be sorted out without a major study. In the area above the kings we have both the Drigung-specific protectress Achi with a retinue of four goddesses (as in the Gyaphagpa) and Tashi Tsheringma (*bKra shis tshe ring ma*) together with her four sisters (*Tshe ring mched lnga*), who are also represented in the Guge style paintings of the apse. In this case Achi and her retinue are represented larger and ride in front of the other group, which may or may not be accidental, but there is no further hint for a Drigung affiliation on this wall. Above the five sisters is the lion-headed goddess Siṃhamukhā, a deity whose worship springs from Padmasambhava who joins her in the painting. The painting of Milarepa to the right of Padmasambhava is clearly of later origin. In the top left corner is a very crudely painted Cakrasaṃvara embracing his consort (see fig. 126 in Kerin's contribution) and between this couple and the Achi group are depicted the Drukpa scholar Taktsang Repa (*sTags tshang ras pa*) and the snake-bodied protector Rahula. Parallel to the large Cakrasaṃvara a form of Mahākāla in the top right corner is only fragmentarily preserved. The crudest paintings on the wall are the two large protectors underneath those described earlier and, flanking the door, the blue Vajrapāṇi to the left of the door and the red Hayagrīva(?), the main protectors of the vajra and lotus families.

With Achi and Taktsang Repa we have both the Drigung and Drukpa School represented in this painting, the latter certainly in a much less prominent position. As such we can read this wall as signifying the gradual change of affiliation of the Nako complex.

The paintings above the sculpture of Prajñāpāramitā, in an area originally most probably

covered with rows of Buddhas, also belongs to this phase of repainting. Today we find Padmasambhava together with his eight manifestations. The absence of specific themes related to the Nyingma (*rNying ma*) School outside the temple dedicated to Padmasambhava and this rather recent depiction is one of the more surprising facts of this analysis of the Nako temples. Elsewhere the Drigungpa are well known for their integration of specific Nyingma themes in their practices and art, but there is no hint for this at Nako, and even in the Padmasambhava Temple, themes that are obviously related to the treasure-text literature (*gter ma*) could not be identified. At Nako the further promotion of such themes appears to be related with the arrival of the Drukpa School. The poorly preserved entry wall of the White Temple (see fig. 108) closely relates to that of the Translator's Temple. Again, the Four Great Kings are shown above the door, Cakrasaṃvara and Four-armed Mahākāla occupy the top corners and Vajrapāṇi and Hayagrīva the door. Now the protectresses are only represented by Tashi Tsheringma, who occupies the centre above the kings.

BOTTOM LINE

The sculptures and paintings preserved in the temples of Nako reveal the past of the complex. They document several historical phases, changes in school affiliation and numerous repairs. Given the extremely rich early phase and a strong Drigung School component, it can be assumed that during those historical periods Nako had housed a larger permanent monastic community which later gradually declined. Even before the last century, the temples document a struggle to maintain the rich heritage through numerous phases of restoration.

In the last two decades alterations to the complex escalated further, in part triggered by the diverse visits of high Tibetan teachers, including the Dalai Lama. Fortunately, most of these changes affected the exterior surroundings of the temples and not their valuable interiors, which have undergone conservation treatment as part of the project celebrated with this publication.

Of course, this survey does not do justice to complex history and the doctrinal changes in evidence in the decoration of the Nako temples. Grasping these would require the dedicated study of each of the monuments along with research *in situ* and detailed documentation following cleaning and consolidation undertaken. More than any other place in the region, the Nako temples preserve phases of the history of the region otherwise highly obscure or not extant at all. Thus they are worth investigation beyond the parameters of this volume.